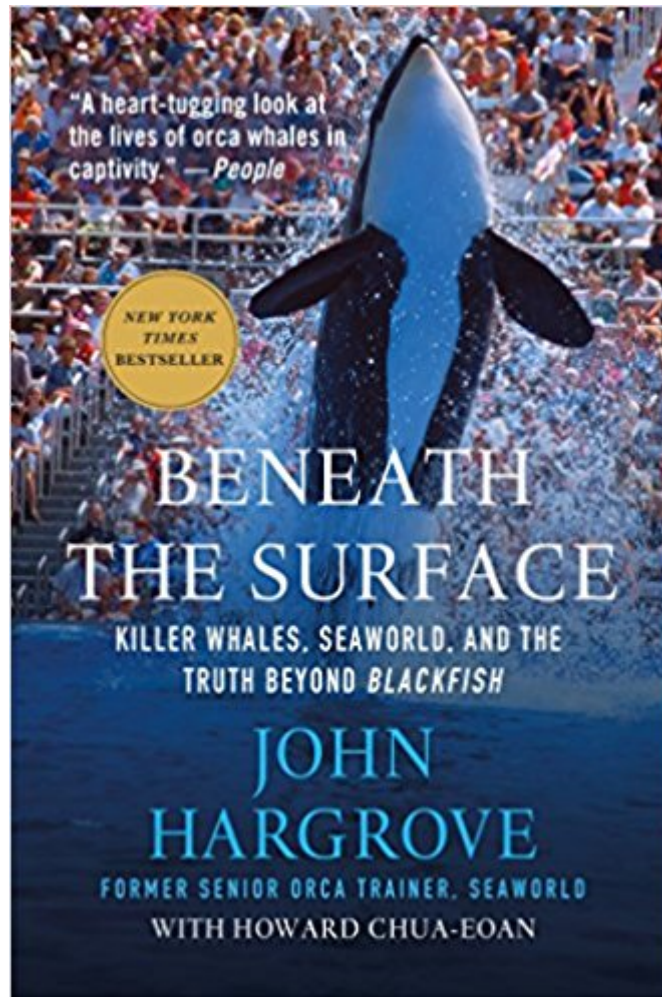


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Beneath The Surface: Killer Whales, SeaWorld, And The Truth Beyond Blackfish



Synopsis

Now a New York Times Best SellerOver the course of two decades, John Hargrove worked with 20 different whales on two continents and at two of SeaWorld's U.S. facilities. For Hargrove, becoming an orca trainer fulfilled a childhood dream. However, as his experience with the whales deepened, Hargrove came to doubt that their needs could ever be met in captivity. When two fellow trainers were killed by orcas in marine parks, Hargrove decided that SeaWorld's wildly popular programs were both detrimental to the whales and ultimately unsafe for trainers. After leaving SeaWorld, Hargrove became one of the stars of the controversial documentary *Blackfish*. The outcry over the treatment of SeaWorld's orca has now expanded beyond the outlines sketched by the award-winning documentary, with Hargrove contributing his expertise to an advocacy movement that is convincing both federal and state governments to act. In *Beneath the Surface*, Hargrove paints a compelling portrait of these highly intelligent and social creatures, including his favorite whales Takara and her mother Kasatka, two of the most dominant orcas in SeaWorld. And he includes vibrant descriptions of the lives of orcas in the wild, contrasting their freedom in the ocean with their lives in SeaWorld. Hargrove's journey is one that humanity has just begun to take toward the realization that the relationship between the human and animal worlds must be radically rethought.

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Customer Reviews

Full disclosure: I am against animals in captivity. I demonstrate at the entrance to Seaworld as often as my work schedule will permit, educating visitors and passer-by's alike--I am NOT A PETA

MEMBER. For me, it's not about loving animals; but rather about loathing injustice. With that said, John Hargrove did not get an automatic free pass from me with the release of this book. I am too well aware that preaching to the choir has often done more harm than good in this "movement." Not the case with "Beneath The Surface." From beginning to end, This book revealed things to (even) me about whales, and Seaworld, etc. that I was ignorant about. I used to love Seaworld when I was a kid, and, although I have always been uncomfortable with the confinement of animals, I didn't absolutely refuse to go until my parents gave me a "choice." One vivid memory I have while sitting in Shamu Stadium is watching the whales and dolphins wade in their small, concrete enclosures; waiting to be called out to the "bigger pool" to do their tricks. I always thought those smaller pools were merely "holding areas" before/during "show time." Little did I know that THOSE WERE IT! There were no huge swimming areas "behind the scenes" etc. It's hard for me to imagine anyone reading "Beneath The Surface" and still buying tickets. Absolutely mind-blowing. And after reading John talk about the (too well known) aggression in captive whales, I don't wonder why Tilikum kills his trainers, I wonder why he doesn't kill ALL of them. (Except for the fact that he can no longer interact with people...and he doesn't even understand why!) I watched Blackfish a dozen times and cried every single time. I was mesmerized, traumatized, heartbroken, stunned. I learned a world of valuable information about Orcas that I never knew before. Seaworld surely isn't teaching it- and they put the CON in conservation. I think "Beneath The Surface" goes even deeper than Blackfish, because we are reminded about a little boy who's whole dream of life was to understand and work with the whales he loved so much. And how this same boy (at heart) left the animals he loved so much so he could create a platform and speak for them, shedding truth on corporate psychobabble. (Another main thing I got out of the book was that Seaworld cares little more for their trainers than they do the animals that they "employ.") EVERY SINGLE PERSON ON THIS PLANET SHOULD BE REQUIRED TO READ THIS BOOK... (including age-appropriate children -- especially -- age-appropriate children.) I still hold resentment to those who misled me when I was a child. Who lied to me? Who taught me that it was ok to kidnap, enslave and even kill whales and dolphins, as long as it makes big corporate bucks? Was it only my parents? My school; IE: fieldtrips? My church? HOW ABOUT TEACHING TRUTH AND COMPASSION NOW...? AND NOT WAIT UNTIL OUR KIDS GROW UP before they learn that this disgraceful treatment of animals is not standard operating procedure. Why wait another day? Every human who has ever used these breathtaking, awesome, highly familial and intelligent creatures to make money should all serve prison terms: confined for 25-40 years in a concrete bathtub.... inside a prison cell. They can get out of it for a half hour 'show' every afternoon walking on their hands in the prison yard- maybe. Bravo, John Hargrove

& Palgrave Macmillan. Change is coming. Thank you for opening our eyes and hearts and for giving us the determination to fight even harder---until every tank is empty.

Killer whales are actually giant dolphins. It has been said that any caged dolphin is insane, and having read John Hargrove's deeply personal account, my belief in that fact is only further reinforced. Mr. Hargrove loves killer whales, and spent years relating intimately with them. Only a handful of people in the world can work closely with these massive, powerful, unpredictable, wonderful, intelligent predators. Captive orca are always in a precarious state of health, their dorsal fins are sunburned, chlorinated water damages their eyes, and they chew their concrete enclosures out of boredom and frustration. So SeaWorld has vets on standby, yes, they stand safely behind a wall several feet away and call instructions for trainers like Hargrove to implement. So not only was Hargrove a trainer and handler, but also nursemaid, and for that he received anywhere from twelve to about thirty bucks an hour, and had constant salary battles with management, proving how little they value even the most elite employees, to say nothing of the whales. 'Beneath the Surface' has a particular strength, empathy. Even the world's foremost orca researchers have not spent any significant time in the water with these animals, whereas Mr. Hargrove effectively became a member of a pod. He describes whale thinking, an intense social hierarchy, evolution, and sex, all in a well-paced wealth of detail. Hargrove is one of the key interviews for the recent documentary 'Blackfish' which graphically shows some of the abuse trainers have taken. John Hargrove has had something like six major surgeries as a result of injuries sustained while performing intricate tricks. He even consulted a prominent NFL doctor who told him his injuries were similar to a multi-year player- which they are, if you can equate a 300 lb tackle to an 8000 lb orca. That being said, the majority of Hargrove's injuries were accidental and the whale displayed tender concern for him, conveying him poolside on a pectoral, or inundating him with sonar to assess his physical state, as an orca has perceptions beyond those of humans and senses your heartbeat and emotional state. SeaWorld comes off as a vile corporate entity, treating both animals and humans as no more than butts in seats and revenue generators. They routinely use emotional blackmail on their employees, breed whales and sell their offspring down the river, pen large animals in tiny enclosures, and blame both fatalities and accidents on the trainers and not the degrading and inadequate jail facilities that they provide as a sick entertainment.

This very interesting book combines information about SeaWorld's use of captive orcas for profit with the story of a man who achieved his boyhood dream job until physical injuries and emotional

and intellectual changes ended that career. I used to be a docent in a zoo and saw many people go through the stages he describes in the book--the initial overwhelming joy of being near and working with the animals, then beginning to recognize problems but thinking they can be fixed, the eventual disillusionment with the organization and questioning the idea of keeping animals captive, and finally the need to leave despite still loving the connection with animals. So I was aware of the general theme and had also seen *Blackfish* for more about the specific SeaWorld situation. The book added some details about behind the scenes events at the company, and a lot of information about the actual experience of training the orcas. I think what struck me the most was how close to the edge of danger and attack these people apparently were at all times. The phrase "the dark side" is used often (a little too often, I thought) in writing about orcas' sudden behavioral changes, as well as the company's treatment of both trainers and orcas. The chapter on artificial insemination is certainly horrific, especially since this was done strictly to make a profit, not with any goal of saving a species as scientists often do. Changes and improvements have begun to happen--may the tide continue to turn.

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